SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS AND BACKTRACKING

Peter Dankmeijer

GALE (The Global Alliance for LGBT Education) Foundation

November 2012

Summary

In the midst of economic crisis and backtracking to traditional values in a number of communities and States, it seem harder than ever to secure human rights.

As an educator, I would promote the view that every problem in essence offer an opportunity for change. Problems arise when the status quo is not working sufficiently anymore and needs to be updated. This article proposes to seize the current turbulence as an opportunity for change and improvement of both development and human rights.

My key recommendation would be to reflect on what we really want on the ground and to engage in dialogue on how to work in alliances to change our societies to the better. This may soon simple and like an open door, but to do this effectively, we need to open up and be able to break down existing categorizations, systems and channels and open up new pathways of trust and cooperation. It requires courage to face the challenge and make s step forward instead of turning defensively inwards and hold on to what we had.

Peter Dankmeijer (1957) was trained as a teacher, but works now as senior consultant on sexual diversity. He has a long history in developing and implementing sexual education, HIV-prevention, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender advocacy and consultancy for national and local authorities on these. Currently he is director of the GALE Foundation, which supports the Global Alliance for LGBT education (www.lgbt-education.info), an international platform of over 600 educators. The GALE Foundation initiates projects that support the implementation of the right to education in schools, local and national levels. He is also director of EduDivers, a Dutch NGO focusing on education and sexual diversity (www.edudivers.nl).

E-mail p.dankmeijer@edudivers.nl Phone: +31 20 428 8073

Coping with rapid change

The world is in rapid change. We feel deeply concerned about the economic crisis but also about the longer term trends to set priorities and make policy decisions based on purely economic and monetary concerns and often based on rather narrow statistical assessments of needs. In our field, education, the right to universal education and access to information seem to get increasingly more narrowed towards shallow defined objectives, tending to hollow out the original purpose of human rights. For example, the Millennium Goals Education For All asks for access to schools, which is measured by access itself and by number of years of school attendance. But in practice it often turns out that kids, and especially girls still cannot read or write quite a number of years in school. This points towards a shallowness in the way the Millennium Goal is formulated.

At the same time we notice a strong trend in some countries to backtrack to 'traditional values'. This is not worrisome because traditional values are bad in themselves but because some states and social partners seem to promote a return to traditional values to reinstate or support harmful practices which deny the access to education, culture and freedom of speech and information exchange to girls and citizens who do not conform to state or social normative pressure like indigenous groups, political and religious sections of society, Roma and lesbian gay, bisexual and transgender people. To us, the trend to backtrack to traditional values seems to be a panic reaction to economic recession and to globalization, which, to some conservative actors, may seem to create a breakdown in the social cohesion of society and the family as the perceived cornerstone of 'traditional' societies. It is an attempt to take back control, while in the meantime taking away democratic participation of citizens, especially of citizens who do not agree or conform to state strategies and norms. The return to 'traditional values' without qualification which values will assist to solve the current crises is not a constructive solution. For example, when economic situations and other reasons break families apart, it is not helpful to create a discourse which raises the status of biological mother-father-child arrangements as

superior to other arrangements, but to create support for all the social arrangements that strengthen new social supportive bonds. Some traditional arrangements (like community support) may fit into such renovated societies and others (like patriarchal families) may not. States and NGOs should keep an open eye to new and real supportive arrangements, which are both respectful for human rights and most effective to cope with globalization and economic fluctuations.

More focus, more cooperation

In the 2012 discussion about the renovation of the "Education For All" (EFA) strategy, we have noticed a shift towards a more focused approach initiated by large international actors like the World Bank, for example on literacy and more concrete objectives to prevent drop-out. This seems a good direction and we would suggest States to explore ways to link into this "Learning for All" movement. The more specific focus on solving concrete problems that apparently are missed by the more formal strategies of "Education For All" is a step forward and has the potential to reach hard cores of marginalized groups which are overlooked by Government Strategies.

I imagine there are also similar developments in other developmental areas: to look more closer to what we really want rather than to stick to formal agreements we made years ago but now do not seems to meet the original ambitions. For example, there seem to be similar developments in the HIV-prevention sector and in development cooperation in general.

At the same time, there are some drawbacks relating to the new and more flexible NGO strategies. One implicit reason behind such NGO initiated strategies seems to be the slow degradation of the influence of National Governments. Where once, the State almost seemed like a monopolist on safety and a strong actor in other field like economy and education, it now becomes clear many States have limited influence over the economy and social realities. Increasingly, States are actually 'selling off' such influence or even giving away influence - which

is for example very clear in the education field where the quality control and direction by States is quickly giving way to autonomy of schools and greater influence of financially powerful investors - if there are any. Such a shift from collective control to market control of course has its consequences: who can pay, get most quality and vulnerable groups are the first and most severe drop-outs.

Another drawback was signalled during the UNESCO affiliated NGO Conference on EFA in October 2012, were I noted an ambiguity of the partners in the formalized UN(ESCO) structure, because strategies like "Learning for All" seem to pass by the obligation of States to implement the Right to Education. Obviously, it would be counter-productive if NGOs (even when they are as powerful as the World Bank) initiate strategies that in the long term challenge the obligations of States or reduce their commitments to uphold human rights for everyone and to improved implementation of Millennium Goals. Economic crisis and attitudinal recession requires a strong partnership between States and the population, i.e. NGOs.

My recommendation would be that States need to re-evaluate their role in society. Rather than acting as a pseudo-policy monopolists, it would be better if States realign themselves as directors of social alliances which work on common goals. Such a position would clarify and open up opportunities with a range of civil society organizations, who actually are looking for leadership. However, leadership in the current era is bound to fail when States (or powerful NGOs for that matter) claim an overly dominant position. The simple fact is that no actor has sufficient power any more to dominate other organizations or citizens. The Arab Spring is Cooperation is a vivid example of this.

Cooperation on *common* goals needs to take into account the a range of needs expressed by different actors. Dealing with diversity, especially by authorities, will therefore becomes a key competence in leadership. To be acceptable to a large range of actors and to be justifiable, concrete goals need to focus on one hand on human rights for all, and on the other hand translate this in tangible and feasible development goals.

Reformulating goals: lasting peace, poverty reduction and quality education
For her Mid-Term Strategy, UNESCO proposed two overarching objectives:
1. to contribute to lasting peace by promoting quality education and lifelong learning, international scientific cooperation, preserving cultural heritage and cultural expressions and promoting intercultural dialogue
2. to contribute to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty by developing policies and institutional capacities in the fields of education, science and culture

The focus on lasting peace is not surprising for a UN organization like UNESCO. The UN was of course established to prevent a third World War happening, and especially to safeguard the safety and dignity of individual citizens vis à vis authoritarian States that see no problem in eradicating and marginalizing parts of their populations. With the current world situation, this is more actual than ever.

But in the mean time, almost all States have become members of the UN. On the one hand this provides a platform for continuous dialogue and cooperation towards peace, including on underlying factors the economy, poverty and education. At the same time, the inclusion of States that even explicitly deny human rights (to which they formally agree by being member of the UN) threatens the original reason for existence of the UN. The battlefields are most visible in several UN bodies like the Human Rights Council and the Committee on Economic and Social Rights (ECOSOC), but also in other agencies where there is a constant 'dialogue' which centre on whether to include or exclude non mainstream population groups and even women.

As an educator, I understand "lasting peace" in the context of the broader phrase "education for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding", which is used in several human rights conventions and recommendations. Such peace strategies and education should include all citizens and all diversity. Basic competences for respect and self-expression are crucial. In the era of HIV and other communicable diseases, comprehensive sexual education is needed to help create tolerance towards diversity and sexual diversity specifically.

There is a general recognition that the economy and (real or the threat of) poverty are powerful factors contributing to peace or war. "Eradication of poverty" therefore is a developmental goal, but one that is extremely important for peace and enduring tolerance. If we throw away tolerance at the first sight of economic crisis, then the position of any marginalized group perilous. The reprehensible rejection of human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people by some African leaders as a 'luxury' issue is one example which shows how socially dominant actors promote intolerance to protect their imagined status quo.

Being a representative of an NGO focusing on LGBT rights, I would like to stress that LGBT people are one on the subpopulations that are stricken most by poverty. Not by accident, but because large numbers of LGBT are structurally excluded from social, professional and economic opportunities. This group is most often overlooked in poverty eradication and disaster relieve strategies. States and UN organizations need to overcome the common prejudice that LGBT people are 'rich gay men in the West' and that sexual identification is a luxury problem. The same-sex attracted girls in poor townships subjected to so-called 'corrective rape', such girls committing suicide when being forced to marry in Asia, the boys who been forced out of schools and kicked out the family home, having to resort to prostitution to survive and the transgender people who are refused to shower in refugee camps and forced to clean the latrines, tell us other stories.

Being also a representative of an educational NGO, I would like to stress also that "quality education" is one of most important needs to rebuild economies and furthermore, to help create cooperation for peace and tolerance. And of course, a good quality education should include the basic need of students that the school provides a safe and inspirational environment, also specifically for LGBT students and students who do not conform to traditional gender expectations.
GALE notes that a majority of schools worldwide still use outdated top-down teaching models, which de-motivate students because of the teaching style and the lack of attention to curriculum content that is interesting and relevant for the daily lives of students.
We encourage UNICEF, UN-Women, UNAIDS and UNESCO to stimulate experiments with students participation in schools and in curriculum development on human rights and sexual education. Curricula that are more tailored to girls, boys, marginalized groups and to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, whether formal or informal, could have an improved impact on the attendance rate, social empowerment and economic survival of students.

Human rights

In the domain of human rights, it needs to be stressed that human rights are indivisible and universal. All people have human rights and should be treated equal, ideally in the social setting in general but certainly by the state. Currently there are still too many states who discriminate, marginalize or persecute whole population groups on poor grounds: migrating populations, people without citizen status, religious groups, political groups, indigenous groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. With the globalization, such internal state policies

increasingly has international repercussions for migration, safety and economic situation. Therefore such discrimination, which may have been part of locally 'acceptable cultural' standards, now creates extra tensions in en between states and threatens economic and social stability. For example, when homosexual acts are illegal in 78 countries, this creates not only large numbers of disenfranchised people WITHIN those countries who cannot fully participate in economic and social progress, but also creates refugee flows that burden OTHER states. It will be increasingly difficult to accept state arguments that other states should not interfere with their 'internal' affairs. Soon there will be no true internal affairs anymore and even today, there are much pressures on states to correct at last the most obvious human rights denials, like the death penalty for voluntary same-sex acts.

Development

Development always has been a partnership between rich and poorer partners, and between state and NGO partners. Now more than ever, these alliances need to be strengthened. In an era where the State is not an all-knowing actor with unlimited monopoly powers, but only one of the actors in an exponentially growing field of non-governmental actors, States need to redefine their positions as a conductor of a series of alliances that in turn are the real implementers of development. States need to facilitate this process and while doing this, attempt to regulate and promote that other actors in turn respect and promote human rights and equal treatment.

This general starting perspective supports the recurring UN proposals to strengthen partnerships and to be closer to the field. GALE developed a guide to advocate for sexual diversity education (http://www.lgbt-education.info/en/news/global_association/news?id=617) (Dankmeijer, 2012a) which contains a proposal for a monitor of the implementation of sexual diversity in education policies. We will engage with both GO and NGO partners to encourage using this instrument. However, our instrument will be much better to use when there would be hard statistics to support analysis.

We would recommend more dialogue and action on how to refine human rights and developmental indicators in order to monitor better the impact of policies and interventions on marginalized groups and to enhance their situation.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues

LGBT issues are relatively new to the UN system and still a large percentage of UN Member States reject the possibility that LGBT have human rights, even when human rights are universal. Usually, the rights of LGBT are being denied because same/sex behavior is reduced by opponents to a form of (according to them) immoral behavior and - as a twisted and exaggerated extension - to a feared breakdown of a traditional family oriented society. This very much sounds like the way Dutch authorities in the 16th century blamed 'sodomites' for the punishment of God through the shipworm infestation of the dikes and the economic breakdown at the time. They hung the sodomites with a lot of publicity, which gave rise to a new self awareness to the sodomites but of course did do nothing to overcome the recession.

We see a similar process nowadays. Conservative forces are panicking because the status quo is being threatened by economic recession and globalization. Conservative and misguided solutions are to backtrack to 'traditional' values and to scapegoat non-dominant groups that are experienced as alien to dominant groups and a threat to conservative senses of security. This does not only disadvantage LGBT people but also migrants, Roma and other smaller groups that are not in the mainstream. Women are also at risk because the traditional view of the family is a patriarchic one, which benefits from women not having work or an education.
But at the same time, the conservative front creates a continuous wave of self awareness of marginalized groups, that organize to defend themselves against further marginalization and become more self-identified and empowered in the process.

This also has a number of side-effects. New self-defined groups categorize themselves to become empowered, but at the same time, by definition, start to exclude other even more marginalized groups. To some extent, the 'LGBT' movement is self-reflective on this and attempts to repair such negative effects by extending the acronym to appealing populations. In the past 20 years we have seen the self-definition growing from gay, to gay and lesbian, LGBT and LGBTIQ and more. GALE has taken a step further and prefers to speak about sexual diversity and if we have to refer to specific 'population groups', to "DESPOGI" (Disadvantaged because of their Expression of Sexual Preference Or Gender Identity) (Dankmeijer, 2012b). The choices for the words "expression" and "preference" present a shift from the essentialist and

exclusive "we cannot help it because we are born with it" approach (sexual 'orientation') to the right and choice to express your feelings.

In the four years of cooperation of GALE with UNESCO, some progress has been made, notably in the UNESCO consultation on homophobic bullying in educational institutions (UNESCO 2012). The focus by UNESCO on bullying and framing 'homophobic' bullying squarely in generic bullying and sexual education priorities, makes clear how LGBT, or rather DESPOGI rights fit in the general frame work of human rights. We need to combat bulling and exclusion for everyone, including the most vulnerable students, like self-identified LGBT students and students for do not conform to traditional gender norms however they are identified. Such more general framing may still be a learning exercise for the parts of the LGBT movement, especially the parts that tend to represent only self-identified small groups and avoid dialogue about inclusion and integration.

Still, good integration and mainstreaming only arises when one can be specific within the larger mainstreamed frames. In the participation of GALE in the formal consultations with other NGOs or as part of the Dutch government delegation to UNESCO, we have attempted to bolster the UN strategy to be more inclusive. We have supported the explicit inclusion of several groups that currently suffer exclusion and therefore cannot benefit fully from human rights or development strategies. However, until now, we constantly have encountered resistance against explicitly mentioning LGBT people as one of the marginalized groups. This is not unique to the GALE-UNESCO cooperation, it is replicated in a number of other UN platforms and also on national and local levels. While we recognize that sexual diversity is controversial for conservative forces, it would show courage and leadership of UN organizations and other authorities to follow the lead of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navanethem Pillay and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to be more explicit on this issue in the coming years.

Summary of my recommendations
1. UN organizations needs to prioritize their role as State partnership organizations, with a focus on concrete goals which on one hand initiate from human rights and on the other hand translate this in tangible and feasible development goals

2. Keep an open eye to new and real supportive social arrangements, which are both respectful for human rights and most effective to cope with globalization and economic fluctuations; LGBT families and support structures are examples of these

3. Strategies for peace and education should include comprehensive sexual education and help to create tolerance towards diversity and sexual diversity specifically

4. We encourage UN bodies, national authorities and NGOs to stimulate or organize experiments with students and youth participation in schools and in curriculum development

6. "Eradication of poverty" should be taken to include LGBT people and other marginalized groups, and take into account how such groups are structurally excluded from social, professional and economic opportunities

7. Refine the human rights and development indicators and monitoring systems and integrate sexual diversity and other diversities in them

8. Be more explicit on inclusion of LGBT issues in human rights and development strategies

9. Mainstream diversity issues in the all UN strategies

REFERENCES:

Dankmeijer, Peter (2012a). Advocate for Sexual Diversity Education. A Guide to Advocate for Enhanced Quality of Education Dealing with Sexual Diversity. Amsterdam: Global Alliance for LGBT Education (GALE)

Dankmeijer, P. (2012b*). LGBT, to be or not to be? Education about Sexual Preferences and Gender Identities Worldwide*, in: Meiners, Erica and Quinn, Therese (eds) Sexualities in Education: A Reader. New York: Peter Lang. (chapter 23)

UNESCO (2012). *Educational Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying*. Good Policy and Practice in HIV and Health Education, Booklet 8. Paris: UNESCO